



# DEUS CARITAS EST magazine

mar 2021



## EDITORIAL

**What will the coronavirus pandemic teach us in the end? >>**

## FRANCE

**Jérôme Lejeune. A prophet for our time >>**

## THE PHILIPPINES

**The experience of the Associate Members in the Philippines >>**

## DR CONGO

**Brother Gabriel and his vision for education in Congo >>**

## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

**Violence in Central African Republic also causing a mental health crisis >>**

## FEATURED: FAITHFULNESS

**Faithfulness is more than perseverance >>**

## VIETNAM

**Vietnam surprised by God's Providence >>**

## PERU

**Our option for the most vulnerable: 59 Years of the Brothers of Charity in Peru >>**

**News from the General Administration >>**

**News from the Communities >>**

**Associate Members >>**

**In memoriam >>**

# What will the coronavirus pandemic teach us in the end?

---

**I**t is a truism to say that we can learn something from any situation. This will also be the case with this pandemic. The question, however, is what we will learn from it in the long run.

Above all, we were confronted with the fragility of life. The myth that we are masters of life, including our own, was shattered. As medical technology advanced, a mentality seemed to grow that we were more and more the masters of life and death. Yes, over both, life and death. New advances are being made constantly to cure diseases that were previously considered incurable, and at the same time a mentality developed whereby, on the basis of the so-called absolute right to self-determination, people determine when and how they can have their lives ended. The pandemic has taught us that our power over life and death is not as absolute as we think, with an unsightly virus magnifying our fragility in an unprecedented way. Will this lead to a rediscovery of our own limitations regarding life and death and also to a greater respect with which we will deal with life, with all life, including unborn life and life that according to purely human standards is no longer considered

useful to be lived any further?



When the pandemic broke out, choices were made as to who would be the first to receive highly technical treatment if there were a limitation in available beds. In Belgium, the elderly population in rest and care homes was clearly put second, which resulted in tragic situations. These ethical choices are indicative of a mentality, and we cannot simply forget them after the pandemic or classify them as errors of judgement. This was more than a mere error of judgement, but an expression of an underlying mentality in which utilitarianism gets the upper hand when choices have to be made. Those who are still useful to society are served first and best, but anyone who is fragile is ranked second in the social system. This applies not only to the elderly in rest and care homes, but also to people with disabilities and chronic illnesses. Such a contrast to the idea that a society's humanity manifests itself precisely in the way it cares for the weakest

and most vulnerable.



*A society's humanity manifests itself precisely in the way it cares for the weakest and most vulnerable.*

In the wake of the pandemic, we see many economic problems arise, and we are particularly concerned about the many people who have lost their jobs and will find it very difficult to get back to work. Behind every unemployed person there is an entire family, often people who already have a poor social status. Whereas before the pandemic they were close to the poverty line and still managed to make ends meet, now they have inevitably fallen below it. Especially in major cities, this is already leading to harrowing situations, which may not be solved just like that. There is visible poverty, but also a great deal of hidden poverty, and it is often those in the latter category who are the last to have recourse to social support.

One year on, it weighs more and more on how our social life is disturbed by this invisible enemy that has manifested itself across the globe in a totally unexpected way and that does not allow itself to be overpowered just like that. What we miss most of all is that spontaneous human closeness that has now been replaced by 'keeping our distance'. The

universal commandment “As I have loved you, so you also should love one another” (Jn 13:34) seems to have been temporarily pushed aside, and it now sounds: “Protect yourselves from one another.” Perhaps this is the first question we should ask ourselves in this crisis: will we, once the world can hopefully be declared corona-free, appreciate each other’s closeness with more gratitude and make up for what we have been forced to miss? Will it lead to greater fraternity, and yes, let’s use the word ‘love’ as it sounds in this universal commandment of love that we have just put forward. How long will we hold on to the loss we have suffered as a reminder of how cold the world gets when we have to temporarily put aside so many social contacts?

The focus is now on vaccination against coronavirus and the speed with which the entire population in every country can be vaccinated. Is it to simply return to our former lifestyle after that, without asking ourselves what we ourselves contributed to allow this pandemic



to take on global proportions so quickly? Many ecological and social questions were and are being asked during the pandemic, but once the pandemic is in the past, will we continue to ask these questions and actually look at what we can learn from it in our daily lives and in the way we interact with nature? Is vaccination, however necessary it may be, in fact not an easy solution to return to our former way of life as quickly as possible without questioning its negative elements? It reminds me of how, at the time of the AIDS outbreak, the primary aim was to find effective medication to control and cure this infection, which was, of course, a legitimate act. But how many dared to question whether behavioural change could also be useful in controlling the AIDS epidemic, supported of course by appropriate medical treatment? Has not the progress of medical science made us too lax to look at the causes when the consequences are too easily treated? How much does it cost the community to treat all these diseases for which the individual himself bears the brunt of the blame because of an unhealthy lifestyle?

As believers, we were tested in another special way when, in certain countries, liturgical services were banned. This decision was sometimes taken very crudely, as if worship were only a marginal event. Nevertheless, churches are places where the distance imposed can be guaranteed without any problem. Other places where this distance was much less guaranteed were still allowed to remain open. But these were places that were geared more towards



enjoyment than towards people's existential and spiritual needs. It says something about the scale of values that society holds. However, is this not also a case of severe discrimination and a veiled attack on the freedom of religion, which implies that people must have the opportunity to express their faith in community? Faith is not an individual matter and a religious celebration can never be replaced by a celebration followed on the Internet. Would it not have been better to leave it to the religious communities themselves to develop conclusive measures that could then be approved or adjusted by the government according to the need, instead of the government itself taking unilateral decisions on this? It is certainly a subject that should be discussed after the coronavirus pandemic, along with the question of what freedom is left for a recognized religion to express itself in society.

The pandemic placed a heavy burden on the entire health care system and those who work in it had to do their utmost. Now is the time to

really appreciate these health professions and be truly grateful to the many health workers for their tireless efforts. The so-called 'soft sector' has shown how much it is needed during this period of true crisis. As a congregation, we have our place in this soft sector and we realize once again how important it is to let professional care always start from charity. It is the human face of care, driven by this basic attitude of love, that has supported many people when, affected by Covid-19, they always met people who were close to them with a lot of love, in addition to the highly technical support. A kind word, a gentle hand, a smile were often what helped them break through the hopelessness of the situation. I myself have experienced that the way breakfast was brought to the door could set the tone for the rest of the day. Was it someone who just shouted from afar that breakfast was being served, or was it a person who showed an interest in whether one's night's sleep had been good. Small gestures of kindness can really work wonders in moments of isolation.

Perhaps there will be other areas that will require a change in mentality after the pandemic. But the question remains whether we will be sufficiently



*Small gestures of kindness can really work wonders in moments of isolation.*

open to it? It is a question that each of us individually, but also as a community, should have the courage to ask, and let us help each other to find good answers and encourage each other when this should lead to a new approach to our way of life. An encouragement we hope we will also receive from those responsible for policy. Then the suffering brought on by the pandemic will bear some fruit after all. ¶

*Bro. René Stockman*



## Jérôme Lejeune. A prophet for our time

---

**O**n 21 January, Pope Francis acknowledged the heroic virtues of Jérôme Lejeune, whom we henceforth refer to as

Venerable. He was already a heroic man when this scientist, who discovered that Down syndrome was due to an abnormality in the chromosomes, as a result of which is became known as trisomy 21, radically took up the defence of these children's lives.

It was after this discovery and its recognition in 1959 that he found that very quickly there were those who considered it logical to resort to abortion when this abnormality was found during prenatal testing. It was a lonely battle in which he placed his further scientific research entirely in the light of the possible discovery of how this defect could be corrected, while at the same time radically opposing all tendencies that questioned the right to life of these children. It proved to be a losing battle, and he realized that in doing so, he lost the possibility of receiving the Nobel Prize for his discovery. But protecting the lives of these children was worth more to him than the much-coveted Nobel Prize.

In the turbulent 1960s, he became an advocate for these children who could not stand up for their own rights and a lonely prophet in an environment that was only interested in the newly acquired absolute freedom and the

ensuing equally absolute self-determination. There were times when he was literally pelted by an angry mob loudly chanting “Boss of your own belly”. But Jérôme Lejeune stood his ground and did not let himself be intimidated by these modernists. He regretted that he found little audience with the French episcopate of that time, who apparently kept silent out of fear, which we still see with some today. Fortunately, there was Pope John Paul II, who was greatly inspired by Jérôme Lejeune’s heroism and who, with the



preparation of his encyclical *Evangelium Vitae*, really encouraged this learned professor, who became his friend. In 1994, the Pope appointed him as the first president of the Pontifical Academy for Life, which he founded, but only a few months later, at Easter, Lejeune died of cancer. When Pope John Paul II visited Paris years later, he prayed at Lejeune’s grave. The now Venerable Jérôme Lejeune, MD, PhD may truly be considered a prophet for our time, when absolute respect for all life, from

conception to its natural end, is in dire straits. Even in Christian circles, people do not hesitate to make unholy compromises on this issue and, under the banner of so-called compassion and a totally erroneous interpretation of respect for personal freedom, they pursue a policy of tolerance towards abortion and euthanasia. Do we, as Christians, still sufficiently realize that every offence against the life of another person, even if this person is not yet born, is an offence against the very image of God present in every human being? In the words of Pope Francis: “We are killing Jesus Christ himself again when we take the life of a neighbour through abortion or euthanasia.”

We need people like Jérôme Lejeune today, who, with clear arguments, scientifically backed and from a grounded reality, take up the cause of life and continue to do so, and do not allow themselves to get carried away by social trends that are literally a dead end. These people will have to know that it will not be easy for them, but again, they can take a leaf out of Jérôme Lejeune’s book, who did not avoid any obstacles, but saw every bit of resistance as a new challenge to articulate his vision with even more clarity.



*We are killing Jesus Christ himself again when we take the life of a neighbour through abortion or euthanasia.*

Hopefully, soon they will be able to call on his intercession in their fight against the constantly growing culture of death. The only answer is a new culture of life! 🙏



*Bro. René Stockman*



# The experience of the Associate Members in the Philippines

---

**T**he Philippines has 7100 islands. Among these, three are major islands: Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao. When the associate members started in the Philippines in 2004, the first Filipina woman and Asian associate member came from the Southern part of Luzon island. The other associates who joined later were from Metro Manila. This year the country celebrates its 500th year of Christianity. We look back on the history of our faith with the arrival of the Spaniards in 1521. The expeditions back then were for “gold, silver, and spices”. After the Council of Trent in 1545 to 1563, evangelization and mission were added to the expeditions’ purposes, and it then became “God, gold, and glory”. This year 2021 would have been the celebration year, but it has been extended to 2022 because of the Covid-19 pandemic. Therefore, how fortunate it has given the associates time to reflect on the Encyclical Fratelli Tutti message.

In the second year of the majority of the associates of the Brothers of Charity in the Philippines, we have been guided by a letter from our Superior General, Rev. Bro. René Stockman, to dwell on this social Encyclical and St Francis

of Assisi's admonitions that we are All Brothers. We are called to a way of life marked by the "flavor of the Gospel." The pandemic, a global health crisis, has shown us that "no one can face life in isolation." It instructs us to accept the reality that the time has come to "dream and journey together as a single human family in which we are brothers and sisters all." As associate members, we wanted to be part of this human family of the Brothers of Charity to make our "common home" more habitable and where Jesus' teaching on the love of God and neighbor is more incarnated. Ever since we joined, it has been a challenging journey of faith in which we got to know the Charism of our Founder Canon Peter Joseph Triest. This discovery inspired us even more to follow in his footsteps as his vision for humanity and care for the poor still echoes resoundingly in our hearts.



The earliest days of our orientation were marked by meeting the Brothers in Pandacan, where the Orthopedagogical Institute is located. We

reviewed the Congregation's temporal works of mercy and tried to see how we could concretely reach out to the poor and let God's love shine on them. Consequently, we solicited food and non-food items, clothes, and hygiene kits. We wanted not just to distribute items but also to do our apostolic works in a way that respected their inherent human dignity – and out of our deep conviction like St Vincent de Paul that they are “the icons of Christ”. This awareness reminded us always to provide donations and items that were in good condition. Even when we had used clothes for donation, it was our utmost preoccupation to ensure they were well cleaned and in good condition. Equally, we packed soaps, toothpaste, toothbrushes, and canned goods to share with them, men and women who lived in the slums and the homeless under the bridges in the inner city.

Together we all continued our linkages with the Vincentian family of Metro Manila. Through these networks and synergy in charity works, we have seen God's Providence and miracles happen. We called and had a sponsor who, like Dr. Guislain, was willing to help and join our relief efforts for the poor. This benefactor donated 1000 kilograms of vegetables at once in September in time for St Vincent de Paul's feast. We arranged with Fr. Rolando S. Limjuco of the Congregation of the Mission to identify and distribute to the communities in need aided by other congregations. We were able to help the elderly cared for by the Little Sisters of the Abandoned Elderly. Similarly, we sent rice to

the Missionaries of the Beatitudes, the Sister Handmaids of Charity of St Vincent de Paul, the Order of St Benedict, the Daughters of Charity, the Sons of Charity, and the Religious of Notre Dame of the Missions.



Foodstuffs were made available to indigenous people and low-income families, abandoned persons with disabilities and persons deprived of liberty. We brought mattresses, beddings, and food to the lepers in Tala, while at the Sagrada Familia, we helped changed beddings and pillowcases for the orthopedically handicapped. We fed malnourished children and provided multivitamins to pregnant women. We cared for children with cleft lips and palates and kept their parents hopeful at the time of surgery. The elderly with cataracts received our caring accompaniment. In all these, we announced our commitment to life for all.

When a new need arose, and we didn't

know how to respond, somehow, with God's help, everything went well. This was true in Myasthenia Gravis Samahang Filipino, an organization that needed our support to provide medicines. When we had no means to move forward, Providence showed us the way by having the right contacts through Ms Carmen Auste of the Cancer Warriors of the Philippines, who later linked us with a government hospital, the Philippine General Hospital. We took other initiatives to support the apostolate of the Brothers of Charity by paying for air time on a nationwide radio station to raise funds for the Psychiatric Center of St Dymphna Gingoog, Ozamiz Oriental. The need to support the mentally ill, especially the young people and spouses, has risen higher due to the pandemic. We decided to put aside our fear and shared our stories on the radio. We spoke about our faith and how some of us are widows and frightened with no income but determined to raise awareness about mental illness and enlist financial support for our psychiatric center. We were ably assisted by the co-anchor Ms. Alona Torres Fortier, a resource consultant from Alberta, Canada.

We told the radio listeners that it is hope strengthened by faith that keeps us going. It is what prompted us to go to deliver goods 500 kilometers south of Manila. Because of Typhoon Rolly that hit Southern Luzon. We shared the surprise that we received one million pesos from Mayor Sweet Halili of the City Government of Tanauan of Batangas. The gift was given

as recognition of our voluntary service when the Taal Volcano erupted in January 2020. Subsequently, we donated the funds to the towns of Tiwi and Malinao in Albay Province. We try to bring not only hope to others but a reminder that God has never forgotten them.

The giftedness of God is what enabled us to give. From our service, we were able to help the homeless, an initiative and advocacy of the Vincentian Foundation. On our own, we had nothing to offer but love and service. In all these challenging moments, we have learned not to despair but to trust in God, for with prayer, nothing is impossible. With the kindness and the generosity of so many people, we have come to experience that God is Love and that he provides for our needs and no one is so poor that he cannot give. Yes, didn't our Founder Fr. Triest say on his deathbed "Give and it shall be given unto you" (Lk 6:38)? There is a true joy in serving the Lord, and these kinds of initiatives are very gratifying.

As associate members, we are also active in the



vocation and animation of the Congregation. We do so by organizing sessions for possible candidates to be associate members and promote the Congregation's publications like on our Founder Fr. Triest and devotions of St Dymphna in the media. We are very close with both the Brothers of Charity formators and the Vincentian Family, in which joint retreats and recollections are usually organized. We have even created a messenger group chat named "BOC PRAYER ROOM", where Brothers of Charity in the Philippines and their associate members pray together at night. This helps us to deepen our Vincentian spirituality and the Charism of the Brothers of Charity. Through such moments, we try to make the connection between the charitable activities that we do and our Catholic faith.

Taking care of others requires us to understand properly who we are and to be grounded in prayer. Our spiritual life deeply inspires our actions. It is by regular prayers, meditations, devotions (Rosary, the Saints, Fr. Triest novena, Chaplet of Divine Mercy, etc.) and regularly participating in the Eucharist that we get the inspiration and the Divine energy to reach out to others. We are merely God's instruments and what we try to do on our part is to try to be open to the grace of God and not to resist it. This inward faith journey and conversion is a lifelong process but very fundamental – for it is difficult to genuinely love others when we have not been attuned to God ourselves, and are not attentive to our family members or our confreres' needs.

Our spiritual life gives us the motivation to help with material things and offer prayer support for those in difficulties like Covid-19 and cancer patients and all who are sick. When one of our associate members is sick, we pay visits, pray, and provide whatever support we can to be in solidarity. This is also true when we recently lost two of our associate members, namely, Mr. Francisco Alcantra and Ms. Maria Fe Mabini. We mourned them profoundly as our family members because the bond we have for each other is deeper and transcends any physical reality. We believe they are in heaven, are praying for us all, and the wellbeing of our religious family of Brothers of Charity.

Being an associate member of the Brothers of Charity has been a beautiful journey of deepening faith and helping the poor in small but concrete ways. This is a way we want to grow in holiness in Vincentian charism while remaining in our lay states as spouses or single with different professional backgrounds. We want to share God's love with others wherever we are. When we meet obstacles, we are not afraid, but with faith, putting in some effort, and networking with others, things have always turned out incredibly well and left us awestruck. The experience we have is that in times of trials and disappointments, the Gospel sends us a message of hope and courage. The Apostle Peter assures us to "cast all your worries upon Him because he cares for you" (1 Pt 5:7). This is the life-giving message we want to carry on this year

and throughout our lives.



*The experience we have is that in times of trials and disappointments, the Gospel sends us a message of hope and courage.*

Even though we are still fighting the pandemic, it will not paralyze our mission, for we have planned before the end of this year for some of us to cross the seas and bring the Word of God, deliver Bibles and miraculous medals to the homeless of an island province known as Catanduanes. We will tell them about the power of prayer and faith and that it is the word of God that will save us and bring a new normal in our lives. With less financial or material goods at our disposal for our mission, but with an abundance of God's loving and compassionate presence, we can face tomorrow with trust. ¶

*Mediatrix Villanueva*



# Brother Gabriel and his vision for education in Congo

---

The year is 1914, barely three years after the Brothers of Charity arrived in what was then the Belgian Congo. Brother Gabriel is the pioneer, superior, language expert, and diligent student, who in no time at all knows how to immerse himself in the culture and the traditions of the country. In his preserved letters to the motherland, we are presented with anthropological studies with only one goal: to gain a better understanding of the initial situation of the children and young people who come to the school in Lusambo in order to develop his educational system. And there lies his first monograph: ‘Essai d’orientation de l’enseignement et de l’éducation au Congo’. A valuable period document that gives us an insight into both the situation of the Kasai population and the way in which education looked in its early stages. We should read it in the context of the times, of course, and from the point of view of a brother-missionary who considered how he could contribute to the development of Congolese youth as a missionary. He starts off with a general statement: a proper education should focus on the development of the mind and the body. “Mens sana in corpore sano.” He explains why he makes this statement



by pointing out the current way of life of the people of Congo. He calls it unhealthy, with a total lack of hygiene, with very one-sided nutrition, and finds in it the cause of many diseases and premature death. "It is health that is to give the courage and strength to work and that is to contribute to the happiness of the person and his family." That is why he sees the school as an actual place of learning towards a better and healthier life. Attention must be paid to nutrition, to the way in which the huts are built, with a particular emphasis on providing a separate hut for the animals that are now often kept in the only hut. Clothing must be adapted to the major climate changes during the day and at night and attention is drawn to the dangers of excessive alcohol consumption and smoking hemp or cannabis. The cleanliness around the hut should help to reduce diseases such as dysentery, sleeping sickness and, of course, malaria. For Bro. Gabriel, this is the basis on which a proper intellectual and moral education can be built.

He therefore sees the school as a true instrument

for better development, starting from the basic conditions for a healthy life.



*A proper education should focus on the development of the mind and the body.*

Then comes the aspect of education as such. Before talking about the content of the education, he reflects on the motivation why the children want to go to school. Some go hoping to have a better life afterwards, a life with less work and in fact mirroring the rich and powerful of whom they have created an idealized image. No, says Bro. Gabriel, their intention must be to become truly good people, who find true happiness here on earth and joy in the afterlife. So, this is quite ambitious! He therefore finds it important that efforts are made from the very beginning to properly identify these motivations and, if necessary, to purify them.

First, there is the intellectual education. The children must learn to read, write, do arithmetic, and learn to know and love God through custom catechesis. For Bro. Gabriel, religion must permeate everything, because according to him, it will be and will remain hard work to draw these ‘pagans’ away from their ethnic religion and customs, and teach them about God. He considers the teaching of religion to be a direct contribution to the mission as it was seen at the



time and was aimed very directly at conversion. In the records of that time, there is always a list of the number of baptisms carried out among schoolchildren.

Parallel to the intellectual education is the moral education. Here, he elaborates on the promotion of hygiene, the teaching of the rules of common courtesy, and helping children to make a clear distinction between good and evil. According to Bro. Gabriel, improving physical and moral living conditions must go hand in hand.

Finally, there is professional training. At that time, the school of Lusambo consisted of a primary school and a professional school. Apparently, there were five departments that were carefully chosen in order to teach the young people a suitable profession with which they could later earn a living. There was typesetting, tailoring, shoemaking, forging, and woodworking. The leaflet has photos of these departments, each time with a bearded brother in charge. Professional training must not be limited to the purely technical, but must also

teach a real work ethic. Reference is made to the situation where it is usually the woman who has to do the heavy work. This has to change, according to Bro. Gabriel, and this can be done by really teaching the boys the joy of work. After this specific part about education and training, Bro. Gabriel elaborates on the importance of marriage as the basis of a healthy society. Again, this should be seen in a context where traditional practices and indigenous institutions such as polygamy was almost common, where far too young girls were already married off and where there was a total lack of education for them. According to Bro. Gabriel, the boys should look for a girl in their village and use the education they received to treat their wife with more respect and not see them as inferior creatures, only suitable to have children and to work in the field. That is why a special case is made for girls to start their education as soon as possible. Bro. Gabriel, who took a course in tropical medicine at the Institute of Tropical Medicine in Antwerp, really shows himself to be an expert in medicine here. He clearly lists the problems women face and gives guidelines on how to care for their children. For example, he says that they should stop using palm oil on their children, as this prevents the skin from perspiring sufficiently. He also provides guidelines on nutrition, the importance of vaccinations and, of course, the use of mosquito nets to protect children from malaria, which was the cause of high infant mortality at the time. Even the way that the umbilical cord has to be tied off is discussed. The education of girls will



have to focus specifically on housework, so that there can be a good division of labour between men and women.

The study ends with an elaboration on the practice of polygamy. He calls it a sign of 'pagan selfishness' and denounces the fact that some chiefs have a harem of a hundred women and that those who can afford it easily have six women, which causes the problem that many men cannot find a wife. Again, he sees the school's great task of helping to remedy this cultural misgrowth. He sees polygamy as a great obstacle to proclaiming the Christian religion, and at the same time he hopes that Christianity can really change this. He therefore fully supported the plan put forward by the Apostolic Pro-Prefect of the Kasai region, which aimed to curb slavery among women living in polygamy and to buy them off, to ensure that young girls would not be married off, and that there would

also be fixed amounts for the dowry, which was sometimes excessive, and which would not allow an ordinary marriage to be concluded, thus allowing prostitution to flourish.

Brother Gabriel wrote a lot, and especially his studies on local languages were groundbreaking. He really was a pioneer and a specialist in this field. During the period when he returned to Belgium as a general assistant, he continued his studies and even became a professor at the Colonial University, known as the University Institute for Overseas Territories as of 1949, where he taught languages. It is difficult to tell where he got the energy to find the necessary time to write high quality scientific works in the field of anthropology, linguistics, and pedagogy in addition to the hard work of building schools. His motto was: “Eyes fixed on the cross, saving souls through prayer and suffering as Brothers of Charity.” ¶



# Violence in Central African Republic also causing a mental health crisis

**SOURCE: CRUX, 24 JULY 2020**

---

**F**ears are growing that the Central African Republic could experience an upsurge of violence as it prepares for presidential elections later this year.

Last week, a UN peacekeeper was killed in the Northwest of the country, in an attack allegedly carried out by an armed group that was part of a February 2019 peace agreement signed by the CAR government and 14 militias.

In 2013, a Muslim rebel group called Seleka took over the government of the country, giving rise to the pro-Christian anti-Balaka militia movement. Eventually, Seleka was driven out, but tit-for-tat violence between nominally Muslim and Christian groups continues to this day, and the central government has trouble exercising power outside the capital Bangui.

The country is 80 percent Christian, 10 percent Muslim, with the rest mostly following indigenous faiths. The Muslims are concentrated in the north of the country, although many work as merchants in the south.

Christian militias have been hounding Muslims in many Christian majority areas, with Church

leaders often offering their church compounds as a refuge.

The ongoing fighting has forced about a quarter of the country's 4.5 million from their homes.

Thousands more have been killed.

Ahead of this year's elections, the UN is already expressing concern about the "influx of foreign fighters and weaponry" into the country.

According to a study carried out by the NGO Save the Children in 2015, 64 percent of children suffer from post-traumatic stress.



*Muslim and Christians take part in a traumahealing workshop run by Catholic Relief Services and partners in Boda, Central African Republic, Sept. 13, 2019. (Credit: Sam Phelps/Courtesy CRS via CNS)*

The Brothers of Charity – an international religious Congregation with a strong commitment to various social justice issues – has taken the lead in providing care for young people with post-traumatic disorders.

“In the absence of adequate mental health care, psycho-traumatized persons could develop other

mental pathologies due to major stress,” Brother Shungo Wababusho Dieudonné, a medical doctor serving in the country, told Crux.

“For children who have a state of post-traumatic stress, we also take care of them and provide them with psychosocial help. They study, and we follow them regularly so that they can lead a quiet life and be able to study like their peers. We also organize child-friendly spaces to enable them to have healthy mental and physical health,” he said.

Here are excerpts of his interview with Crux.

### **How has the war affected young people, especially their mental health?**

**Bro. Dieudonné:** War or armed conflict is among the causes of psychological trauma. The Central African Republic is not spared; many children, adolescents and adults have experienced horrific events. These events eventually affected their mental well-being. We observe in young people from, for example, the 3rd District [a neighborhood of the capital Bangui], a high number of users of psychoactive substances. Other districts are certainly affected.

In children and adolescents, manifestations of post-traumatic stress are observed such as: fear, enuresis – peeing in bed after 6 years, poor school performance, confusion, etc. Adolescents and adults are not spared at all. For example, adolescents and adults, especially males, use certain painkillers that they abuse in order to relieve their stress. Example: Tramadol. They also consume high-alcohol drinks and drugs. For

example: Hemp.

## **Do you have any idea how many people suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders?**

According to studies conducted by Save The Children in March 2015, 64 percent of children have a state of post-traumatic stress; 87.4 percent of children have a sub-syndromic form of a state of post-traumatic stress.



## **What could be the dangers for these people not having access to adequate health care?**

In the absence of adequate mental health care, psycho-traumatized persons could develop other mental pathologies due to major stress, including acute delusional puff, schizophrenia, depression, excessive consumption of psychoactive substances.

## **What assistance have the Brothers of Charity given them and how do they respond to it?**

As a Congregation, we Brothers of Charity could

not be indifferent to the suffering of our fellow men. Our patron Saint Vincent de Paul said: “The poor are masters.” And our founder paraphrased Jesus saying: “What you do to the least of you is to me you do.” Our role is to bring dignity and restore the tarnished image of our brothers and sisters affected by various mental illnesses, in general, and post-traumatic stress in particular.



*As a Congregation, we Brothers of Charity could not be indifferent to the suffering of our fellow men.*

We have established a center for psychosocial listening and mental health care (CEPSSM) with the objective of improving the quality of mental health care. Locally, mental illness is considered a bad spell, witchcraft ... This qualifier of mental illness is followed by stigma.

That is why, as a Congregation, we have created this centre that provides quality care to patients suffering from mental illness – children, adolescents and adults affected by a state of post-traumatic stress. Now, the population gradually understands that mental illness is not necessarily bad luck or witchcraft. This is thanks to the awareness that we are conducting in different districts to explain and make the population understand the factors of vulnerability of mental illness, the management and the evolution of the disease. Being affected by mental illness is not

a death sentence. One can be cared for and lead one's life quietly.

For children who have a state of post-traumatic stress, we also take care of them and provide them with psychosocial help. They study and we follow them regularly so that they can lead a quiet life and be able to study like their peers. We also organize child-friendly spaces to enable them to have healthy mental and physical health.



**Finally, how would you describe the security situation in the Central African Republic today and what are the paths to lasting peace?**

The security situation? Currently relatively calm although there are some unrest in some areas. The paths to lasting peace must be justice, reconciliation, and forgiveness. There can be no lasting peace without justice. ¶



# Faithfulness is more than perseverance

---

**W**e wish our newly professed brothers that they may persevere in their vocation. And this we repeat when we look back at a nice round number to mark a monastic jubilee: this brother has persevered in his vocation. However, is perseverance the right word, and would it not be better to speak of faithfulness rather than perseverance?

## Faithfulness is more than perseverance

Faithfulness expresses something dynamic and flexible, while perseverance comes across as more static and harsh. Is that perhaps the most striking difference: dynamic versus static? Faithfulness is indeed dynamic and creative, which is why we like to talk about creative fidelity. Faithfulness creates enthusiasm and renewal, while perseverance requires repetition and can therefore eventually become a very tiring task. Persevering is the person who always wants to stay in one place and perceives every change as a threat, while faithful is the person who constantly opens up to new challenges. Perseverance therefore means that one wants to comply strictly with the prescribed contract, while faithfulness mainly involves listening to what the person who drew up the contract wants to offer us today. Faithfulness is when one becomes aware that one is in the hands



of someone who loves us, and it is the love of the Other that forms the true basis of our faithfulness. Perseverance can give rise to pride because one wants to persevere on one's own account. Sometimes one will persevere for fear of the unknown. Faithfulness will never be about fear, because at the basis of our faithfulness is Someone who loves us. And faithfulness will never result in pride, because faithfulness is above all a gift before it could become a task. We cannot deny that there will be days when it will come down to perseverance, days when we struggle to keep our ideal in mind. But such days should only be interludes and short interruptions in the keynote of our lives, which must be marked by faithfulness. Our faithfulness will eventually find its true source in Whom our vocation is rooted, and above all, Who is faithful and remains faithful to us, and Who continues to call and summon us, even when we are in danger of becoming unfaithful ourselves. It is through our dynamic, creative faithfulness that our vocation will continue to be deepened, moving closer to the essential, while perseverance

carries with it the danger that we might stagnate in our vocation and not allow it to evolve with the changing environment and the changing situations in which we find ourselves.

### **Conditions for being faithful**

In order to grow in faithfulness, certain conditions are necessary in our lives.

First of all, it is important that we really know ourselves and get to know ourselves better and better. Here, we immediately arrive at the importance of formation and continued formation in our lives. The vocation we have received must grow, and grow with us, and become a very personal project. That is why we must dare to ask ourselves what is really important in our lives and how far we have come in this life project. The question then sounds as to whether we are growing in the image of His Son that the Father has planted in us and that can only grow if we open ourselves to the working of His Spirit. Are we growing in the likeness of Jesus, is our life becoming more and more similar to that of Jesus as we come to know it through His Word that He spoke to us and the life that He lived for us? In the end, our life must be an imitation of Christ, no more and no less. Our life can be described as a trinitarian project and therefore requires a constant interaction between God and ourselves. This in itself sounds very dynamic, requires creativity, and above all openness to the workings of God's Spirit. It is very clear here that it cannot be so much a question of perseverance to a once given word, but rather of faithfulness to the Word that is

spoken to us every day and to which we must listen, to which we must open ourselves. Getting to know ourselves is a life-long task, an ever deeper discovery of our weaknesses, the way in which we deal with our passions, whether we let them develop into true edifying forces in our lives or as devastating impulses. It is also getting to know the energies that drive us and that allow us to do full justice to our talents. Often, we will have to conclude that we do not know ourselves at all, that we only know the surface of what goes on deep within us. Our daily examination of conscience, thorough spiritual guidance, and regular confession can help us to let what is hidden come to the surface and to confront it with our vocation as human beings and as religious. It is in this that we may grow our dynamic and creative faithfulness to our life's calling.

Active openness to everything that comes our way can be regarded as a second condition for being faithful. Our lives are a patchwork of events that can deeply affect us, from encounters that shape our lives, from successes and failures, from moments of crisis and moments when sin takes hold of us, from illness and health, from enthusiasm and full energy in our youth to diminishing strength as we grow older. And we could add to this list almost endlessly. It is not a question of passively going through all this under the cloak of obedience and perseverance, but of actively responding to it. To see all this as the unique path God wants to take with us. That is why we should not see obedience exclusively as giving a positive answer to what the superior

asks of us, but much more broadly and above all as responding positively to everything we encounter on our life's path. We must always ask ourselves what God wants with us in this situation. Everything has meaning; it is up to us to find it and to put it in the light of God's Providence.

Our faithfulness will have a specific meaning in the light of the charism we have received as consecrated people. Entering a congregation is the start of a journey of discovery in which we will identify more and more with the charism of the congregation, or rather, in which the charism will increasingly become our inner life and bring colour to our whole existence. We will not just be members of the Congregation, we will be the Congregation, our lives will be totally imbued with and transformed by the charism of the Congregation. Once again something very dynamic sounds here, a development in our lives that will never come to an end. Through our charism, we increasingly have the same attitude that also Christ had (cf. Phil 2:5). It is a growth in depth. In our faithfulness, we will always have to be guided by our charism, and each moment of our life will allow a very specific attribute of Christ to come to life. In this way, this attitude that Christ had will also be ours, and this again through the different situations in which we find ourselves.

### **Moments in our lives when faithfulness can be put to the test but can also grow**

Every life has its critical moments, moments of doubt and uncertainty. These are excellent

moments in which we can grow in dynamic and creative faithfulness.

It might be a moment when we fail in our apostolic mission. This can cause a lot of pain and doubt. But it might also be a moment when we think seriously about whether we are really engaged in the Kingdom of God or rather, whether we are building our own kingdom. The efforts are indeed in our hands, but not the result of our activities. We must consider ourselves sowers and find our joy in that, without worrying too much about the harvest, which depends on so many factors other than ourselves. In this way, our failure can become the moment when we re-evaluate ourselves in our apostolate and place it in God's hands with complete trust, and really see it as God's work with us.

Sometimes we are disappointed by those we really had hopes for and relied on. We become victims of criticism, and sometimes we are shown in a very bad light. We can even be falsely accused without having a chance to expose the truth right away. It can be a moment of great desolation. Let us then recall the text of Psalm 27: "Even if my father and mother forsake me, the Lord will take me in." It is precisely in these moments of abandonment that we can become more aware that the Lord never forsakes us. It can become a moment in which we grow in our trust in God and God alone.

Perhaps we might struggle with a decision of a superior, of the Congregation, when we receive a new mission. Everyone around us says that the apostolate we are carrying out and the place where we are staying will continue to need us.

The danger is that we may become entrenched and, as a veiled form of self-interest, resist to respond to the new mission. All human arguments will then be used to prove ourselves right. But in that case it is good to remember the biblical examples of obedience: how, against all logic, Abraham always responded in a positive way to what God asked of him, how Mary said yes to something that seemed humanly impossible, how Peter was asked by Jesus to cast out the net on the other side of the boat. We know the latter's reaction: "Master, we have worked hard all night and have caught nothing, but at your command I will lower the nets" (Lk 5:5). This last one is very powerful: Peter is allowed to voice his argument, but he leaves the last word to the Lord. He does not have to deny his experience as a fisherman, but faithfulness to the Word of the Lord goes beyond his experience. The vow of chastity lived within our consecrated celibacy will remain a task for our entire lives. There may be moments of real crisis, in which we even risk being unfaithful to our vow. We may



fall under the spell of a relationship, of obsessive fantasies, of unwanted forms of compensation, of addiction to the Internet. Once again, this can confuse us and make us seriously doubt whether this way of life is right for us. We are familiar with the phenomenon of the 'Noonday Demon', which can even take a complete hold of a religious who is already older. These are moments of renewed choice and of a renewed search for the true joy that can bring us the exclusive relationship with the Lord instead of losing ourselves in temporary pleasure. We will either lose ourselves in the pursuit of pleasure, or we will deepen our renewed relationship with the Lord in prayer, in contemplation. Here, it becomes very clear what Paul meant by his "for when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Cor 12). It is in our weakness that we can experience God's grace and His forgiveness, and ultimately our weakness will become the path that will lead us to the Lord time and again. Let us not forget how even the criminal on the cross was forgiven by Jesus and offered Paradise.

Life has growth, but it will eventually also decline. As we grow older, we will have to make more and more sacrifices: our health, our energy, the friends and confreres we lose and with whom we have had the opportunity to travel along the path of life, the apostolic works we have to relinquish, the responsibilities we have to pass on to others... For some, these are dramatic moments, but here, too, there are opportunities to grow towards what is essential in our lives: our relationship with God and with God alone. The important thing is to see this time

of relinquishment as an opportunity to create new space for that which is essential. It can be a period of true deepening of our consecrated life, as a second novitiate where we use the experiences we have gained during the past period to try to bring everything in line and thus come to real peace with ourselves, with our neighbours, and especially with God.

## Conclusion

Perseverance and faithfulness, two concepts that we have tried to compare. When all that matters is perseverance in life, it may well be that we shut ourselves off from the new things that are offered to us, and we cling to beliefs and actions that ultimately lead us to a rigid existence. Any deviation or adjustment is then considered an unfaithful act to a word once given. No, it is not about making compromises or allowing our lives to be determined solely by the situations in which we find ourselves. On the contrary, that would mean unfaithfulness. It is about dynamically and creatively asking ourselves time and again what is the essence of our life, what is the true ground of our received vocation, how we can best build the Kingdom of God in the world, how we can be moved increasingly by the charism we have received. ¶

*The reference for this article is the periodical of the Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life 'Sequela Christi', 2018/02, 'Discernere e accompagnare'.*



# Vietnam surprised by God's Providence

**O**n 11 January 2021, the Brothers of Charity in Vietnam joyfully inaugurated a centre for psychiatric patients in Bao Loc city, Lam Dong province, where the Vincent de Paul community is located and belonged to Da Lat Diocese. The inauguration ceremony had the presence of our benefactors, friends, workers, priests, religious, and most particularly the presence of His Lordship Bishop Dominic, the Bishop of Da Lat Diocese, and his Lordship Bishop Emeritus Anthony of the same Diocese, who first welcomed the Brothers to the Diocese. Their presence was a blessing and added colour to our ceremony. The success of this first project of the region helps us to look back with deep gratitude. We could remember in detail how it all happened and how we experienced God's



providence in a tangible way and the solidarity of being “One Heart One Soul.”

The Andrew Phu Yen region of Vietnam was established on September 26th, 2018, and it has been just for 2 years and a few months since its inception. When we received the news that Vietnam would stand as a region, we still remember the emotions we had at that moment. It was confusing for most of the members of the region because we did not expect that new development, and we were a bit afraid and unprepared. We were worried because we are still very young and with less experience as a region. The fear was not just abstract, but it was based on human logic that we could see all the brothers, the regional superior, and his councillors were young to lead the region for the very first time. Not only that, we remember at the time Vietnam became a region, there were a lot of difficulties challenging the entire congregation: the euthanasia issue and divisions, the financial crisis, and the dwindling of vocations. All these elements and difficulties have immensely affected us as a region, but we remain hopeful and unbowed.

At the same time, the owner of the land in Bao Loc (near our community) wanted to sell the rest of the land, which was just right behind the piece of land they had offered us. They needed money urgently to help their daughter for her wedding because they were in dire need. We knew that it was not ideal to provide good services for the patients with a very small piece of land we had. This could as well affect the life of the community, and it was not good if someone else

bought the land right behind the centre. But at that time, we had nothing and our bank account was dry. So many problems were challenging a very young region that struggled even to put food at the table, and how could we even buy this beautiful and spacious land?

At this very hard and hopeless moment, God was slowly showing us his love and actions. In prayer, He inspired us to believe in his providence, and we took initiative to enlist the help of the local ordinary from Da Lat Diocese who was Bishop Anthony at the time. The bishop didn't give us cash as such, but a letter that explained our need to build a house to serve psychiatric patients.



*At this very hard and hopeless moment, God was slowly showing us his love and actions.*

With that letter, we got enough support from many churches that were willing to make sure that our project could materialize. The result was that we had enough donations to buy the rest of the land. Afterward, we were more confident with God's providence and boldly decided to build the centre, even though we had not enough money for that because all the money had been spent on purchasing the land. Nevertheless, we could feel the presence of God in every decision-making and God was going ahead of us every step of the way to realize our plans. Even when we met some



setbacks, faith in God sustained us that it was his work, and we were just his imperfect instruments and that he would find the way where there is no way. Experience is a good teacher for we felt God never abandoned us. He sent many generous people to come to our aid in many and surprising ways. Some donated food; others gave building materials and the little money they had. Little by little, we had enough funds and could say confidently among ourselves that this project would be finished soon.

Just before the end of the project and a few weeks before the inauguration, the sudden loss of our confrère Bro. Banaba Cong Nguyen Van was like a storm amid the sea that hit the ship of the entire region. It was painful for us that we lost such a very good brother who offered all of his life to follow Christ. The passing away of Bro. Banaba helped us to come closer to one another, we cried as a family losing a blood member. It was at this moment we realized we were no longer different from each other, but as a real family with “one heart one soul.” We live happily

together but also in moments of sorrow there are strong bonds and solidarity. Bro. Banaba's active involvement with the project and the patients was a serious blow for us, and we lost our strength and confidence. But in hindsight, we recognize that God was still sustaining us with his love and comfort. He turned back to lift us and helped us to finish the rest of the project. Now the project is finished, and we can look back with gratitude and see his invisible hand and how he can make springs of water even in the desert places. He is prodigious, lavish in giving, and his infinite goodness has even broadened our depth of seeing things.

Like St Vincent de Paul the patron of our community, who insisted on trusting in God's providence we are a living testimony of his conviction because God enabled us to execute and finish this project in an extraordinary way and beyond our imagination and expectation. Along the way we always encouraged one another to trust in God's providence, we asked every member of our two communities of the



region to pray every single day both personally and communally for the project, for the region, and the congregation. And in his turn, God never failed us. As someone once said, when you do God's business, he takes care of ours. He shows his love and his ways for those who keep trusting in Him. We could finish this project because of God's providence that touched good people to pour out donations, and we are blessed because we had nothing but God. We had empty hands so that we could receive much, and our hands are full and overflowing of his love and infinite goodness.

Now the popular Vincentian phrase of "Walking with Providence" we could understand deeply, especially when you have no material security to rely on. The difficulties which we are facing now as individuals and as a congregation have their reasons. But as we have come to reflect, problems can seem gigantic when one no longer prays and has lost faith in God and his providence. Regular prayers open in our hearts to see hope and new horizons in difficult circumstances.



And it makes more room for living properly as Brothers of Charity, caring for one another and the poor that God puts on our way. With an open mind and trusting in God's providence, we can grasp and understand the difficult experiences we go through in life as a necessary purification to unclog our hearts and let the Divine love flow in us.

With God's providence, we also came to experience how much the strength of "One Heart One Soul" could have an impact on us. In a time of difficulties, we have turned to God and one another for support and encouragement. Building the centre for psychiatric patients in Bao Loc is not only the project of the Vincent de Paul community but also is the project of the region, of the Congregation and the Church. Every member of the region, the brothers, the postulants, and the candidates tried to contribute their very best. Brothers used their time and even their holidays to come to Bao Loc to help in the construction work, which helped to save a little money for the region. The regional council



met monthly, and we shared the difficulties and tried to find solutions together, supported by one another.

We also received a lot of support from the Congregation through Bro. General Superior, Bro. Provincial Superior of Asia, Fracarita, and some benefactors outside the country. Most especially, we got a lot of strength and support from prayers, and through God's guidance which kept us united with one mission. Also, we are confident that our success is also a result of prayers not only from the Brothers of Charity but also from the laity and other people of goodwill. We thank God for allowing us to experience again and deeply than ever this spirit of God's love and communion. As a Brother of Charity, we must try to develop this aspect of charity throughout our lives.

We thank God for his love and providence that we could receive a lot through this project.



We appreciate once more for your prayers and financial support, for you were like God's angels

sent to minister to our needs, and you were a constant reminder of his providential care. ¶

*Bro. Michael Oanh Ngo Xuan*



# Our option for the most vulnerable: 59 Years of the Brothers of Charity in Peru

---

**T**o the many generations that knew Bro. Joseph Turcotte, “Pepito”, the name Tingo Maria is very familiar because for him and for many of our missionary brothers of the St. Anne Region - Canada, Peru represents their second homeland. This year, on February 15th, our Region of St. Martin de Porres celebrates 59 years of the Charism of Charity in Latin America. Since the arrival of the first missionaries, the way of service through the Christian Apostolate has always represented an option for the most vulnerable. So, when we reflect on these 59 years, we see how several initiatives have been taken, around changes, adaptations, and consolidations. A country like Peru, which is very diverse in its geography and has a millenary Inca culture, also faces multiple challenges and limitations that have represented immense sources of reflections around the poor and the marginalized, to whom our South American Pope refers many times.

The first and most important milestone for our first brothers was regular education for children and young people in Lima and Tingo Maria. The education offered to the youth brings opportunities for the future. Similarly, other services were developed such as youth

animation, primary health care for the native communities of the Amazon, care for people with physical disabilities, and catechesis in rural areas.



However, a major problem from the South American region that affects the world is the drug trade, which, in Peru, reached its peak in the 1990s. According to official data, to date, it is estimated that there are more than 60,000 hectares (ha) of coca in the country with a potential production of 600 tonnes of cocaine. The dynamics of drug trafficking are not only related to the search for new routes, drug transportation modalities, or financing schemes. There is also a high level of internal demand for it in Peru. But cocaine is not the only main addiction problem in Peru, there is also alcohol, synthetic drugs, gambling, among other behavioral addictions.

That is why the Brothers of Charity, sensitive to this reality, for the past 32 years have provided

treatment for adult men with addiction problems, and their families, from a Therapeutic Community model, at the “Escuela de Vida” (School of Life) Rehabilitation Center in Lima. This center started as an initiative of the Religious Life in Peru. In the beginning, several religious communities contributed to its foundation and development. Our brothers have given a lot with their example of life and their dedication to these people. As is the case of our services in Latin America, since 2013 we have developed an integrated management model. With the necessary experience of our predecessor brothers and a strong inspiration in our Charism of Charity, we can continue to develop professional models, integrated with a Christian motivation for suffering- and for our collaborators to provide support to patients to discover their weaknesses and enhance their capabilities, so that they can fully reintegrate into their family and community.



Today, we are the only private center recognized

by the Ministry of Health to provide the necessary treatment for highly complex addictions such as dual disorders (addiction and other psychiatric disorders). Also, since 2018 we are part of a network for the treatment of adolescent criminal offenders associated with drug use, providing them with outpatient care. Each year, there is an average of 900 people who benefit directly from our services in our different programs.



Thanks to our great team of professionals, committed to our evangelical values, amid this COVID-19 crisis, we continue to provide services to those in need. Since March of last year, we have adopted and implemented strict security measures for care as well as new admissions for inpatient treatment. It is in this context that we will celebrate our 59th anniversary, together with our other two services in Peru, COSMA, for mental health care and CEPETRI, our school for special education. Like our pioneer brothers who first arrived in Peru in 1962, we remain dedicated and committed to restoring human dignity and

changing lives integrally. For as Pope Francis says:

“The Church which ‘goes forth’ is a community of missionary disciples who take the first step, who are involved and supportive, who bear fruit and rejoice... An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people’s daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others” (Evangelii Gaudium N°24).

We too as Brothers of Charity can’t sit back and remain indifferent to Church’s mission to the poor, but we wish to continue to be beacons of hope amidst human anguish and suffering. ¶

*Bro. Jimi Huayta Rivera*



# News from the General Administration

- In view of the pandemic, several planned activities and visits could not take place during the past year. In January, the Superior General resumed his visits to the regions, starting with a visit to the International Novitiate in Nairobi, followed by a canonical visit to Tanzania. The classes planned at the International Institute Canon Triest in Moerzeke will be taught online due to the quarantine measures imposed. On 23 February, the Superior General will start his lecture series at the Pontifical Lateran University in Rome.
- Bro. Jean-Marie Mukonkole, Vicar General, visited the Our Lady of Africa Region – Congo at the end of December. Bro. Deogratias Rwabudandi went to Rwanda in November. Bro. Jimi Huayta-Rivera left for Nicaragua and Peru in mid-January.
- In mid-December, the finance committee met with the General Bursar, Bro. Eric-Ferdinand Twizeyimana, to gather the budget proposals for 2021 and to draw up an overview, which will be further discussed with the provincial and regional superiors.

- A meeting of the committee responsible for revising the Constitutions is planned for the spring.
- Together with the provincial and regional superiors, the strategic commission is continued online with Mr. Willem Duron as an external supervisor. There is also a consultation with the General Council at regular intervals.
- For personal reasons, Bro. Jean Mbeshi resigned as Regional Superior of the Saint Paul Region (South Africa and Zambia). Since the beginning of January, he has been temporarily replaced by Bro. Pasco Chola Mutale. Bro. Jean Mbeshi returned to Congo where he will be given a new assignment. We thank him for his commitment and wish Bro. Pasco a fruitful mission.
- Bro. Faustin Wabulasa, formerly the superior of the scholasticate in Abidjan, was appointed superior of the scholasticate in Nairobi to replace Bro. William de la Croix Mulenda, who is returning to Congo. Bro. Laurent Koffi will take over the responsibility in Abidjan.
- Postulants are expected to arrive at the International Novitiate in Nairobi at the beginning of April, in order to start their canonical novitiate training in September. Bro. Daniel Mbenga will be in charge. ¶



## CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

# St Damien of Molokai Community, Bangui



The community of Bangui in the Central African Republic, with enthusiasm welcomed the visit from December 09-14th of the Regional Superior Rev. Bro. Janvier Batumike, accompanied by his two regional councilors, Rev. Bro. Gregoire Mubale and Rev Bro. Ernest Ciza. They visited the community and at the same time participated in the perpetual profession Rev. Bro. Olivier Sepamio in the parish of St Charles Lwanga. This is the same place where the Brothers settled when they first arrived in the Central African Republic. The visit in Bangui finished by taking some time visiting the tomb of our dear deceased confrere Bro. Jean Salumu who passed away in July 2017. ¶



## IN MEMORIAM

**Mr. Roger Chaussé**

Roger Chaussé was born on 5 June 1933. He made his promises for the first time on 15th August 2012. The subsequent promises he renewed faithfully and fervently. He knew the Brothers of Charity from a young age as an apprentice barber. He was going to do his practices on the heads of children in rehabilitation at Mont Saint-Antoine de Montréal of the Brothers of Charity. He constantly collaborated with the Brothers not only as a barber but also as a handy man with many skills. Always ready to be of service, always available. He participated in all our happy (birthdays) and painful (funerals) moments. How can we not remember his welcome and even worry about the service at the tables. When he died on 3rd of December 2020, we truly lost a great friend and a great support. Our deepest

sympathy goes to his wife Maria, who is also one of our Associate Members.

## DRC-KINSHASA

We had the recollection of the Associate Members of Kinshasa on the 21st and 22nd of November, which was animated by Brother Bernard Ntambwe. It was followed by a general assembly. The theme was: “The Life of the First Christians” through the text of Acts 2:42-47.



Bro. Bernard said, it is surprising that the Lord Jesus chose such a normal group of men, full of weaknesses, without a university education, full of zeal and jealousy at the same time, to be his representatives on earth. On the following day, we ended the recollection with the subject of “Servant Leadership” based on the text of Mt 20:25-28. We could define servant leadership as “the unceasing search for service rather than domination.” Authority in servant leadership must be a service that is inspired by the life of

Jesus Christ, who is the model for leading and influencing others well.

At the end of the recollection during the general assembly, new leaders for the associate members were chosen: Frank Bazaba as a representative, Eddy Kanyiki as his deputy, Roger Kitere as secretary, Blandine Mulonsi as treasurer, Ndo Jean Marie as responsible for spirituality, and Kikaba Marie Josée for public relations, supported by Denis Matondo. We wish them all the best in their new mission to serve as leaders. On the 19th of December, we had Mass for the renewal of the promises of 20 associate members of the Saint Augustine community in Kinshasa. They too wish to continue to share our charism by deepening their spiritual life with particular sensitivity to the poor.

## PAKISTAN



On 1 November 2020, associate member Miss Christina Saraj renewed her promise for three years. We had a beautiful and simple ceremony during Holy Mass, and her renewal was her continued commitment to deepen her faith in our Vincentian Charism.

## CHINA



Our Associate Member Fr. Paul Liu Jiangang renewed his promises on 5th February in Beijing. We thank him for his continued commitment to live the Charism of the Congregation and for being a witness to many of God's abundant love.

## PAPUA NEW GUINEA

On 3<sup>rd</sup> February, our associated members had been visiting the sick patients at our nearby Clinic Centre (Yamapu); whereas they prepared more food and distributed to them and had a good time of praying together. The patients were

very happy to know that the Brothers of Charity  
where collaborating with them.

So, our sharing of news here is also to let you  
know that the work is continuing and is taking  
shape.



# Brother Jean-Baptiste Kalyalya Musonsya 1980-2020



To meet Bro. Jean-Baptiste Kalyalya was to experience a sense of harmony, tranquility, and simplicity that radiated in his life. This was exemplified as a person who didn't attract attention to himself and even his simple lifestyle and dressing code sent a clear message that he was an inexpensive brother who lived the evangelical vow of poverty radically. The news of his passing away on November 18th, in Kalemie-DRC came as a thunderbolt to many and it left us to wonder why he left us so soon at a tender age of 40? The reality of life as to how and when we will die will continue to remain a mystery to us and we shall perhaps know this puzzle in the afterlife.

Bro. Jean-Baptiste or JB as he was fondly known in Marumba joined the Brothers of Charity in 2002 in Tanzania. As a very young man, he was attracted by our Charism and became one of the first Congolese Brothers from the Eastern Congo (Kalemie) to cross Lake Tanganyika and come to join in Kigoma. Before joining the Brothers of Charity he had followed some training in general pedagogy at Mwangaza College in DRC where he obtained a diploma. After some time in postulancy and because he exhibited already seriousness in his vocation in March 2004, he was sent to our International Novitiate in Maria-Aalter, Belgium where he followed formation with great attention. While still in Belgium, he had the opportunity during his second year of novitiate to follow an Introduction to Psychiatric Nursing that was organized by the International Institute Canon Triest in collaboration with the Catholic University of America, in which he got a certificate. This experience became invaluable in his later life as it made him get acquainted more closely with our Charism and Mental healthcare. After the novitiate, he returned to Kigoma and professed in 2006, and thereafter he was sent for further studies at Lubumbashi Higher Institute of Medical Techniques (ISTM) where he earned his degree in Nursing.

JB proved himself as a devoted and dedicated man. After his professional formation at our Scholasticate in Lubumbashi he returned to Kigoma and was posted to work at our St. Dymphna Psychiatric Center and the postulancy house in Marumba, where he was ever-present. He served in various capacities as a director

of the center and also as a local superior at our formation house. When you met him he exhibited simplicity and you would not notice that he had such leadership positions because he preferred to remain ordinary and without any limelight. Staying in Marumba made him closer to the patients and his brothers and his concern was to make sure he served them wholeheartedly. He was always ready anytime to drive patients in our ambulance wherever they had some referrals. Despite the treacherous and mountainous roads, he had become adept in navigating the dusty terrains with the ambulance that has been dubbed Air Marumba. He was a trusted pilot you could count on, and always eager and generous to share the car wherever it was needed for other exigencies in the region.

As he worked in Marumba he also served at one point as the Regional Councilor of St. Dominic Region-Tanzania, and he was not quick to speak. He was attentive to listen but when he spoke on his point of view, he was firm and at times had difficulty to see other perspectives. Perhaps as it is for all of us, this was his blind spot, but he would always argue with respect and remain polite.

When he passed away many brothers who knew him could not believe and were in deep sorrow. The Belgian Missionary Bro. Marc Beetens who has lived with him in Marumba and did formation together described Bro. Jean-Baptiste as “a very warm, kind, friendly, committed and very competent brother. It was a real pleasure to work together with him.” He further said that “[Bro. JB] presence brought peace and harmony

in the house where he was living.” This is a very accurate description of his life and I can attest to the fact that I stayed with him briefly in Kihinga in 2002. Over years he remained as a calm brother and a peace-maker. He was a man who was approachable and kind to all people and he enjoyed a warm conversation with his confreres after a hectic day. It was at these encounters that he could exude his sparkling sense of humor and a belly laugh that was so contagious. These moments acted as a buffer to cushion the difficulties of life and not to take oneself too seriously. Love is not an easy feeling to put into words-nor is kindness, or goodness, or joy. But Bro. Jean-Baptiste was all of these. He loved life completely and he tried to live it intensely. Before his demise, he had been not feeling well for some time and the brothers had made sure he got all the support and treatment he needed. When he felt some relief he sought to visit his family in Kalemie where he finally succumbed to his ailment. Perhaps his strong desire to visit the family was as though he wanted to be buried by his ancestors, who are very much respected in the African culture. By being buried there and the Brothers traveling from Kigoma to witness his final journey is as though prophetically he is making a statement that one day we should consider opening a community there. Providence knows the best, and though we still grieve his untimely departure we are consoled by the fact he is now being held in the embrace of a merciful and welcoming God.

# Brother Barnabas Cong Nguyen Van

## 1978-2020



Brother Barnabas Cong Nguyen Van was born on November 7th, 1978 in Ha Nam Commune – Nam Truc District, Nam Dinh Province in the northern part of Vietnam. From 1994 to 1996, Brother Barnabas and his family moved to the southeast of Vietnam, to Bac Lieu Province. Brother Barnabas was an independent person who worked hard. He did different kinds of works throughout his life and he was not afraid of any hardship. He tried to take care of himself and helped his family in many ways. He was someone who could communicate and collaborate well

with others. He lived his Catholic faith as a good person, trying to imitate Christ, his model, in his daily life. Step by step, God became his refuge and strength and tried to respond generously to his call. It became evident to him that God called him to serve the poor and those who suffer.

In 2009, he took an important step in his life as he became acquainted and came to see and stay with the Brothers of Charity. From the beginning, he was worried but because of God's call to be a Brother of Charity, he gradually let go of the worries and continued answering God's call. After staying with the Brothers and being attracted to our Charism, he decided to join the Congregation. He was enthusiastic and happy to be part of this religious family and he became more and more open to God's grace and his promptings. He truly tried to renounce all attachments, possessions, and fame to live for God full-heartedly. In 2010, he was accepted as a postulant, and after two years of postulancy, on August 31st, 2012, Bro. Barnabas entered the novitiate in the Philippines. This moment proved to be very fruitful for him because he clearly saw that God meant him to be a Brother of Charity. After the canonical year, he was sent to Sri Lanka for the second part of his novitiate, where he became more closely acquainted with our apostolic works and the charism. It was a key moment in his consecrated life, a time he intensely experienced God's merciful love and felt ready to pronounce his first vows. Indeed, it was on August 28th, 2015 in Sri Lanka, that he pronounced his first vows in the hands of our Reverend Brother Superior General.

After the first vows, Brother Barnabas received the mission to take care of psychiatric patients at Nhan Ai Bach Lam Center in Dong Nai Province. From 2015 to 2017, he worked at this psychiatric center and gave himself fully to serve these miserable people with love and professional care. At the time he worked at this center, he deeply felt our charism to serve and love the poorest of the poor and it was a time for him to live his vows with more dedication. On July 16th, 2016 he renewed his vows for two years without hesitation.

In 2017, Brother Barnabas was transferred to the Vincent de Paul Community in Bao Loc City, Lam Dong Province for the new mission of the Congregation. Here, he was to form a community and a new center to take care of psychiatric patients. Once more, the Congregation had full trust in him and gave him this mission in a new place, with new people, and new patients and he did complete the mission well. At this time on May 26th, 2018 he renewed his vows again for three years with generosity and thanking God for the gift of his vocation.

He was supposed to make his perpetual profession this year but God had another plan, a plan that he was not to make that commitment on this earth but in heaven. And on December 18th, 2020 at 19:35 PM God called him to his eternal home. His departure left us with so much grief and pain. His confreres, family, and friends felt his passing away deeply and they could not understand God's plan, but we trust that he is in a better place now, interceding for us. Looking back on 42 years of his earthly life, we may feel

the streaming grace which God had poured upon him, especially, as an authentic Brother of Charity who consecrated himself to God unreservedly. We are grateful to God for sharing his life with us and we pray that his soul may rest in eternal bliss.

## **Brother Jozef Costermans** **1946 -2021**



There's always someone who needs to open the gate of heaven to greet, perhaps in the course of the coming year, other Brothers of Charity. This

year it was Brother Jos Costermans who died on 4 January, after a difficult and premature decline, in our Convent Residential Home Saint John in Zelzate.

Originate from Essen, where he went to school in the former school of the Brothers of Charity at that time and who provided many vocations for our Congregation, Jos became a postulant in Saint-Maria-Aalter where he continued his novitiate training until he made his first profession on 19 September 1966, and where he received the name Brother Bosco. He then moved to Zwijnaarde where he was studying to become a teacher, and after completing his military service, he received his first appointment as a brother-teacher in the first year of primary education in Turnhout, and where he also became Director of one of the primary schools two years later. He was allowed to stay there until 1982, and it was always with great gratitude that he thinks back to that first time when he was at the university and his work with the little ones. His own simplicity and dedication made him a true specialist to introduce those youngest children each year in what would become so important later in life.

A long period was then followed in Eeklo, where he also taught in primary school. Eeklo was a small brother community, strongly connected to parish life and an established destination for the Eeklo population. Every brother had his special assignment, and most of the boys in Eeklo passed through one of the brother schools before their primary school and kept the best memories of it for the rest of their lives. Regretfully, we have

seen that we had to merge the schools at one point and also close the community. For Brother Jos, it was a moment to start another apostolate, and after a short period in Knesselare he became co-founder of our community in Ronse where they would live together with people with AIDS. A contemporary small-scale project started by the Congregation in response to a new need. Brother Jos revived in this community and could do what he had always done: to service. It was also in line with his former apostolate where he also addressed himself to the youngest. Now they were people who had ended up on the margins of society because of their illness. For twenty years, Brother Jos has been able to cooperate there, sympathize and be really happy there. No, we never heard Brother Jos complain, and he had a good relationship with his confrères and Jeanine, an associate member of the community of Ronse. He was not the kind of person who liked to push himself to the front, but preferred to stay in the background and, above all, to serve. How many hours has he spent in the kitchen?

Lately, he went through more suffering and his health deteriorated sharply. In the beginning of last year, he went to our Convent Residential Home Saint John in Zelzate, where he was surrounded by the best care. It was a slow farewell to life, but his death was still unexpected. We are grateful to Brother Jos, for his simple life in service of others, as a Brother of Charity in its purest form with only one basic characteristic: to serve and that after the example of Jesus himself and carried by a faithful daily encounter with God in prayer and the Eucharist

and that in close communion with his confrères.  
He may now enter into God's eternal love for  
which his whole life was one longing.





Brothers of Charity  
Broeders van Liefde  
Frères de la Charité  
Fratelli della Carità

Via Giambattista Pagano 35  
00167 Roma - Italia  
[generalate.communications.office@fracarita.net](mailto:generalate.communications.office@fracarita.net)

[www.brothersofcharity.org](http://www.brothersofcharity.org)